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Excellence in Leadership: The Maine Management Service

How does a governmental organization go about building leadership skills among its key executives? It goes well beyond establishing policies or providing management tools such as performance appraisal systems. It requires significant cultural change – it requires developing a new understanding of and appreciation for the place of leadership in Government. This series of articles highlight Maine’s program to recruit, develop and retain a cadre of top leaders: the Maine Management Service.

This article examines the leadership challenges facing Maine and provides an overview of Maine’s model for change. The next article will describe Maine's process to create new systems and at the same time to build “passionate champions” for change among influential leaders throughout State Government. The third article will outline the components (policies, programs and implementation tools) that form the Maine Management Service.

The Challenge facing Maine State Government

The Aging of Current Top Management

The Maine Management Service is comprised of approximately 600 classified and unclassified “confidential” managers. These managers form the senior management teams for State agencies. Like many organizations, Maine State Government is facing extensive turnover among our top managers and executives over the next ten years. Over 50% of top managers will be eligible to retire within five years. We must prepare for this exodus by developing the leaders for the future.

Outdated Classification System and Rules

Currently, there are 300 job classifications for Maine's 600 senior managers. Some classifications comprise a single position. Job descriptions often focus on professional, technical qualifications and neglect entirely management functions and leadership abilities. Civil service rules are overly restrictive and do not recognize unique departmental needs. We need to develop a system that recognizes similarities among management positions and develop rules that enable departments to carry out their missions.

Managerial Effectiveness

Excellent leadership is critical to the effective delivery of services. The quality of governmental services depends largely on the abilities and commitment of the people who provide these

services. Managers directly influence how well people do their jobs and whether they stay in those jobs. This idea is worth a more thorough discussion.

Our research has shown that the leading cause of job dissatisfaction and turnover is an employee's relationship with their manager. From Maine's "Managerial Effectiveness Survey" of state employees (with 4,000 or 33% of employees responding) we found that:

- 80% of our employees like their jobs, but
- 50% are dissatisfied with the way they are managed, and
- Almost half (45%) say that they would seriously consider leaving state government for similar work with similar pay and benefits.

This last finding is particularly striking, as research indicates that employees typically will not change employers unless the pay difference exceeds 20%.

Employee turnover is expensive. The cost of replacing an employee is approximately four times the salary of the replaced employee. Particularly in more skilled positions, when employees leave, knowledge is lost to the organization forever. It can take up to a year before new employees are as productive as their predecessors.

Yet, workers will stay and will perform effectively if they are satisfied with their managers. What's more, satisfied workers are more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors --behaviors that go beyond job descriptions and role requirements and help reduce workload or stress of others in the organization.

Managers must provide employees with the tools they need to do their jobs --regularly coaching them and providing a compelling vision --and doing it all with integrity. In short, good managers need to be leaders. We can positively affect employee productivity, job satisfaction, and retention by improving leadership skills among our key managers and executives.

Maine's Model for Leadership

If we are to improve government services, we need to understand what excellence in leadership means to us. We asked agencies to identify their best managers and the qualities that contributed to their success. In every case, they defined successful managers as those possessing qualities above and beyond the technical abilities needed to the job. We call these leadership competencies.

We continued to work with these managers to develop a "competency model" for leadership in Maine State Government. Maine's competency model is simple by design so that managers and executives can easily use it. It is composed of ten competencies organized in three domains:

LEADERSHIP

- Integrity
- Effective Communicator
- Supportive Coach
- Visionary

EFFECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVER

- Analytical Thinker
- Systems Thinker
- Creative

STEWARDSHIP

- Customer Focused
- Results Oriented
- Sound Judgment

This model, unique to Maine State Government and developed by Maine's top leaders, forms the foundation for the Maine Management Service.

Maine's New Leadership Programs

Improving leadership requires us to change our human resource systems. A Steering Committee of Deputy Commissioners and other key managers identified the three priorities that we are focusing on:

- Leadership development (by far, the #1 priority identified by all groups)
- Selection and succession planning (turnover due to retirement of the "boomer" generation is at hand!)
- Classification and civil service rules (simplification so that managers can work effectively, while preserving merit principles.

The leadership competency model provides a means to communicate what we expect of our leaders and provides a "road map" for recruiting, developing and retaining current and future leaders. New leadership development programs focus on true leadership development (as opposed to managerial skills) among our current and future leaders. The selection system focuses on identifying leadership qualities and potential (in addition to technical or program-specific qualifications) and recruiting leaders based on them. The revised rules are far less prescriptive and are designed to allow agencies to tailor selection and development programs to meet their unique needs.

Maine's Implementation Strategy: HR gives up control

It is important to note that key leaders throughout State Government are setting priorities, developing these programs, and implementing them. This is not an HR driven program and a great deal of effort has gone into building commitment among an ever-expanding cadre of managers and executives.

Article 2 will describe in more detail the process that Maine used to develop new systems and in the process build an ever-growing cadre of "passionate champions" among key managers and executives. Article 3 will describe these new processes and tools in more detail. More information on the Maine Management Service can be found on the Maine Bureau of Human Resources web site at www.state.me.us/bhr/mms/index.htm.